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EXTENDABLE REARVIEW MIRROR

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an exterior rearview mirror assembly for a vehicle including a mirror which can be extended from a normal viewing position adjacent the vehicle to an outboard position for improved rearward viewing.

Exterior rearview mirror assemblies are typically used on all motor vehicles. Adjustable or extendable exterior, side-mounted rearview mirrors are also known in the art. Extendable mirrors provide improved rearward viewing, for example, when the vehicle is towing a trailer, camper or other towed item. These mirror assemblies typically incorporate a mounting bracket which extends from an exterior panel of a vehicle. In one prior art example, a rearview mirror is positioned on the mounting bracket and can be extended to an outboard location by loosening a fastener and sliding the mirror outwardly for improved viewing. In another prior art example, a rearview mirror is positioned on an extension bracket located on a mounting bracket which can be rotated about a vertical axis to an outboard location for improved viewing.

However, such rearview mirror assemblies have certain problems, particularly with respect to the mounting brackets. These rearview mirror assemblies, especially those incorporating an extended mounting bracket, experience a great deal of vibration during operation of the vehicle. The mount structure used in the prior art mirrors are not able to withstand this vibration and, therefore, display a great deal of shaking in the mirror image during the operation of the vehicle.

Another problem in the prior art is the difficulty an operator experiences is adjusting the rearview mirror between an inboard and outboard position. An

operator may only wish to use the outboard position temporarily, and it is important to allow easy and quick movement between the two positions. The prior art has not been able to successfully provide an extendable rearview mirror assembly that is easily moved between inboard and outboard positions and still able to withstand the vibration experienced by such assemblies during operation of the vehicle.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one feature of this invention, a mirror is extended laterally outward from an inboard position to an outboard position where a secondary mirror surface is exposed, thereby providing improved lateral rearward viewing. In the inboard position, the secondary mirror surface is concealed behind the mirror and mirror frame in a mirror housing. The mirror assembly comprises structure to allow easy movement of the mirror and mirror frame laterally outward relative to a mirror housing from the inboard to the outboard position. The structure provides a secure mount at either position.

In other features of this invention, a mirror and at least a portion of a mirror housing are rotatable about a longitudinal horizontal axis which runs through the plane of the mirror. The longitudinal horizontal axis is offset from a central vertical axis of the mirror. Rotation of the mirror about the horizontal axis moves the mirror relative to the vehicle between inboard and outboard positions i.e., thereby providing improved lateral rearward vision to the operator of the vehicle. Again, the mount structure allows easy movement and provides a secure mount.

In one preferred embodiment of this invention, the extendable rearview mirror assembly includes a mirror shell having a post aligned with a longitudinal horizontal pivot axis offset from a central vertical axis of a mirror. The mirror is rotatably

mounted in a mirror frame which is rotatably spring-loaded onto the post. The mirror frame is thus biased against the mirror shell for improved stability. The mirror frame has detents defining inboard and outboard positions, which are selectively received in a notch disposed in the mirror shell. In a most preferred embodiment, the mirror shell also has a reflective surface located behind the mirror and mirror frame in the inboard position, which is exposed when the mirror and mirror frame are rotated to an outboard position.

In another preferred embodiment of this invention, the mirror assembly includes a mirror shell which has a slot or groove running the horizontal length of the mirror shell. A pivot cap and pivot member are securely mounted onto a post which is attached to an exterior panel of a vehicle. The groove of the mirror shell is received on the post. The pivot member is rotatably spring-loaded into the mirror shell. The spring loading of the pivot member in the mirror shell biases the mirror-shell against the post for improved vibrational stability. An operator of the vehicle is able to quickly and easily rotate the mirror and mirror shell about a longitudinal horizontal axis defined by the central axis of the pivot member. The mirror and mirror shell are rotated about the horizontal axis by pulling the mirror shell away from the post, thereby removing the post from the groove or slot, and rotating the mirror shell 180° to an outboard position. The groove is received on the post at this location and the spring loading biases the mirror shell against the post to provide stability.

In another preferred embodiment of this invention, the mirror assembly includes a mirror disposed in a mirror frame, which is slidable between inboard and outboard positions. The mirror frame is disposed in a mirror housing having a

secondary mirror surface, which is concealed behind the mirror and mirror frame in the inboard position, but exposed in the outboard position, thereby providing improved rearward viewing. The mirror frame is disposed in a groove in the mirror housing with a plate biasing the mirror frame in the groove to provide a secure
5 mount for the mirror and mirror frame during operation of the vehicle.

These and other features of the present invention will be best understood from the following specification and drawings, of which the following is a brief description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

10 Figure 1 is a perspective view of a rearview mirror assembly in accordance with the invention herein;

Figure 2 is a cross-sectional view of the mirror assembly of Figure 1 along line 2-2;

Figure 3 is a cross-sectional view of the mirror assembly of Figure 1 with the
15 mirror in an extended position;

Figure 4 is a front elevation view of the mirror assembly of Figure 1;

Figure 5 is a perspective view of an alternative rearview mirror assembly in accordance with the invention herein;

Figure 6 is an exploded perspective view of the alternative mirror assembly
20 of Figure 5;

Figure 7 is a cross-sectional view of the mirror assembly of Figure 5 along line 7-7;

Figure 8 is a perspective view of another alternative rearview mirror assembly in accordance with the invention herein;

Figure 9 is an exploded perspective view of the alternative mirror assembly of Figure 8;

Figure 10 is a cross-sectional view of the mirror assembly of Figure 8 along line 10-10; and

5 Figure 11 is a cross-sectional view of the mirror assembly of Figure 8 with the mirror in an extended position.

Figure 12 shows another embodiment of an inventive mirror which is particularly useful in original equipment applications.

Figure 13 shows a rear view of the Figure 12 embodiment.

10 Figure 14 is a cross-sectional view through the Figure 12 embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT OF THE INVENTION

Figure 1 illustrates a novel rearview mirror assembly 20 which can be rotated
15 between an inboard position and an extended, outboard position. The outboard position provides better viewing when the vehicle is pulling a trailer, camper or other towed item. The construction of the mirror assembly, particularly the mounting of the mirror and mirror frame in the mirror housing of the mirror assembly, is secure and resists typical vibrational forces exerted on rearview mirror assemblies during
20 operation of the vehicle. Therefore, the rearview mirror assembly 20 provides improved rearward viewing without distortion in the mirror image.

As shown in Figure 2, the rearview mirror assembly 20 includes an attachment member 22 for mounting a mirror shell 24 to an exterior panel of a vehicle. A mirror 26 is centrally mounted on a mirror frame 28 which is received
25 in mirror shell 24. A mounting post 30 extends along a longitudinal horizontal axis of the mirror shell 24 which is laterally offset from the central vertical axis C of the

mirror shell 24. The mirror frame 28 is mounted on post 30 and held in place by nut 34, which is received over and fixed to post 30. As shown, there is slight clearance between post 30 and frame 28 such that frame 28 may rotate relative to post 30. Alternatively, the two may be fixed for common rotation. Spring 32, with
5 nut or retainer ring 34, biases mirror frame 28 rearwardly against a plate or backing 44, which is fixed to mirror shell 24. Mirror frame 28 includes detents 40 and 41, one of which is selectively received in a notch 42 disposed in backing 44 and the other of which is received in notch 43. Backing 44 may preferably contain a reflective mirror surface 46, which provides additional rearward viewing for an
10 operator of the vehicle when the mirror 26 is in the outboard position.

In an inboard position, a lateral edge 36 of mirror 26 is disposed adjacent the vehicle, detent 41 is received in notch 42, detent 40 is received in notch 43, and mirror surface 46 remains unexposed behind the lateral edge 36 of mirror 26 and mirror frame 24. The mirror frame 28 and mirror 26 are disposed in the mirror shell
15 24 such that the circumference of the mirror frame 28 is aligned with the circumference of the mirror shell 24. The spring 32 biases mirror frame 28 rearwardly against backing 44, thereby maintaining the mirror frame 28 and mirror 26 in its inboard position and resisting vibrational forces on the mirror. The mirror frame 24, and hence mirror 26, can be rotated about the central axis of the
20 post 30 to an outboard position, which is shown in phantom lines in Figure 1, as described below.

As shown in Figure 3, in an outboard position, the lateral edge 36 of mirror 26 is disposed remote from the vehicle, detent 40 is received in notch 42, detent 41 is received in notch 43, and mirror surface 46 is exposed for additional

rearward viewing. The mirror 26 defines a plane. The mirror 26 and mirror frame 28 rotate about a longitudinal horizontal axis which extends through the mirror plane, and is generally perpendicular to the plane of the mirror. In this embodiment, the central axis of the post 30 defines the longitudinal horizontal axis which travels through the plane of the mirror about which the mirror 26 rotates. Preferably, the longitudinal horizontal axis is disposed midway between the central vertical axis and the outer lateral edge 38 of the mirror frame.

As shown in Figure 4, the operator of the vehicle can easily and quickly rotate the mirror from an inboard to an outboard position for improved rearward viewing. First, the operator of the vehicle pulls the mirror frame 28 and mirror 26 outwardly along the longitudinal horizontal axis to move detent 41 outwardly from notch 42 and detent 40 out of notch 43. This is shown in phantom line in Figure 2. Mirror frame 28 and mirror 26 are then rotated 180° about the central axis of the post 30. The spring 32 biases mirror frame 28 back rearwardly against mirror shell 24. In an outboard position, a lateral edge 36 of the mirror 26 and mirror frame 28, previously adjacent the vehicle, is disposed in a position remote from the vehicle. The distal or outer (in the inboard position) lateral edge of the mirror 38 is rotated 180° to a position adjacent the vehicle. Detent 40 is now disposed in notch 42, and detent 41 is now disposed in notch 43. At the outboard position, the mirror assembly 20 provides additional rearward viewing to an operator of a vehicle by positioning the mirror farther laterally outwardly than it was in the inboard position. This outboard position is particularly helpful when the operator of a vehicle is pulling a trailer, camper or other towed item. Because of the mounting design, mirror 26 and mirror frame 28 are securely biased against the mirror shell 24.

The mirror assembly 20 is thus able to resist the vibrational forces typically experienced by a rearview mirror assembly during operation of the vehicle.

As shown in Figure 5, an alternative rearview mirror assembly 60, which may be particularly useful in a heavy truck or camper-type vehicle, includes an L-shaped post 62 which has a lateral portion that attaches to the side of a vehicle 50 and a horizontal portion that attaches to mirror shell 66. A mirror 64 is centrally mounted on mirror shell 66 in any known manner. In this alternative embodiment, the operator of vehicle 50 is able to easily and quickly rotate the entire mirror 64 and mirror shell 66 from an inboard position to an outboard position (shown in phantom lines) to provide improved rearward viewing.

As shown in Figure 6, mirror shell 66 contains a slot or groove 68 which runs the length of the mirror shell 66, and includes a pivot slot 70. Preferably, groove 68 is triangular in cross-section, thus providing two contact lines, even if there is dirt on post 62 or in groove 68. Slot 70 receives pivot member 72. Pivot member 72 has a shaft 74 which is axially received in bore 76 of pivot slot 70. Pivot member 72 is rotatably mounted in pivot slot 70 by sliding shaft 74 through aperture 76. Coil spring 78 and retainer ring 80 are axially received from the mirror side of mirror shell 66 onto shaft 74 of pivot member 72. Pivot member 72 also includes a channel 82 on the opposed end to shaft 74 which is received on a portion of post 62. Channel 82 is aligned with groove 68 such that post 62 is received in both. Pivot cap 84 also has a channel 86, which, together with channel 82, secures the pivot assembly on post 62. Pivot cap 84 and pivot member 72 are securely mounted onto post 62 with screws 88.

A pair of alternative grooves 68a allow further rotation positions for the mirror. When post 62 is received in grooves 68a, the mirror will extend generally vertically, thus protecting the mirror.

As shown in Figure 7, post 62 is disposed between pivot member 72 and pivot cap 84 in channels 82 and 86. Post 62 is also disposed in slot or groove 68 for a substantial length of the horizontal portion of post 62. Because pivot member 72 is spring loaded onto mirror shell 66 by spring washer 78 and retainer ring 80, and pivot member 72 is securely mounted onto post 62, the mirror shell 66 is biased against post 62 with groove 68 received on post 62, along the horizontal length of mirror shell 66. The biasing of mirror assembly 60 against post 62, allows the mirror assembly to resist the vibrational forces typically experienced by mirror assemblies during operation of the vehicle.

The pivot axis of the mirror assembly 60 is aligned with the central axis of the pivot cap 84, pivot member 72 and pivot slot 70, which travels through the plane defined by mirror 64. This axis defines a longitudinal horizontal axis about which the mirror rotates and is laterally off-set from the central vertical axis C (see Figure 6) of the mirror shell 66 and mirror 64. The mirror 64 and mirror shell 66 can be selectively rotated between inboard and outboard positions about the longitudinal horizontal axis. In the inboard position of the mirror assembly 60, a lateral edge 90 (see Figure 5) of the mirror shell 66 is disposed adjacent the vehicle and the post 62 is disposed in groove or slot 68. When, for example, an operator is pulling a trailer, the operator may rotate the mirror shell 66 and mirror 64 to an outboard position by, first, pulling the mirror shell 66 and mirror 64 along the longitudinal horizontal axis defining the pivot axis away from post 62, thereby displacing post 62 from groove

68. Then, the mirror shell 66 and mirror 64 are rotated 180°, until post 62 is again aligned with groove 68. Mirror shell 66 is then released and biased back to position the mirror shell 66 against the post 62 in an outboard position.

Because the pivot axis is offset from the central vertical axis of the mirror shell 66 and mirror 64, the outer edge (90a in Figure 5) of the mirror shell 66 and mirror 64 is now disposed farther outwardly than the lateral remote edge 92 of the mirror 64 and mirror shell 66 in the inboard position. Preferably, the longitudinal horizontal axis is disposed midway between the central vertical axis and the outer lateral edge 92 of the mirror shell 66.

As shown in Figure 8, another alternative rearview mirror assembly 100 comprises a mirror 102 disposed in a mirror frame 104 which can be extended from an inboard position to an outboard position to provide improved lateral rearward viewing to the operator of a vehicle. The mirror assembly 100 includes a mirror housing comprising a shell 106 and a rim 108 which form a groove 110. The mirror frame 104 is disposed in groove 110 and is slidable between an inboard position and an outboard position (shown in phantom lines).

As shown in Figure 9, the mirror assembly 100 also includes an attachment member 112 (e.g., a post) which attaches the mirror housing to an exterior panel of a vehicle. At the other end, post 112 slides into sleeve 113 disposed in mirror shell 106 and is securely attached thereto to resist the vibrational forces experienced by the mirror assembly 100 during operation of the vehicle. Alternatively, the mount might extend through a bottom opening 113a, depending on the vehicle. Mirror assembly 100 also includes spring plate 120 and bracket 122 which are disposed in mirror shell 106. Bracket 122 is received on bosses 123 disposed in mirror shell 106

and over sleeve 113. Bracket 122 is securely fixed in mirror shell 106 by tightening self-tapping screws 125 into bosses 123 in mirror shell 106. Bracket 122 contains a channel 126 which receives sleeve 113 and also contains posts 127, which receive and support spring plate 120. Plate 120 is securely attached to bracket 122 by heat
5 staking the end posts 127 in openings 129 in plate 120.

As shown in Figure 10, mirror frame 104 contains a detent 114 disposed in a lateral edge adjacent the vehicle which is received in notch 116 of rim 108 when the rearview mirror assembly 100 is in the inboard position. The detent 114 and notch 116 are biased into the mirror frame 104 at the inboard position and prevent
10 the mirror frame 104 from sliding out of the inboard position without a predetermined pulling force being applied to the mirror frame 104. A reflective mirror surface 115 is disposed in mirror shell 106 adjacent the vehicle and concealed behind mirror frame 104 in an inboard position.

As shown in Figure 11, mirror frame 104 also contains a stop 118 which
15 prevents the mirror frame from completely sliding out of groove 110 and housing 106 when a pulling force is applied to the mirror frame 104. When a pulling force is applied to mirror frame 104 detent 114 rides out of notch 116 from an inboard position toward an outboard position, until stop 118 prevents further movement of mirror frame 104. Spring plate 120, which is attached to bracket 122, provides a
20 bias force against mirror frame 104 to provide a secure mount at either position.

It is envisioned that the inventive mirrors could be provided with an adjustment motor by having the motor push against the mirror shell, rather than the mirror plate. In such an embodiment, the mirror would be mounted to the vehicle

such that movement of the entire mirror shell relative to its mounting bracket would be affected to adjust mirror positioning.

Another embodiment 150 as shown in Figure 12, and is particularly useful in original equipment applications. The outer housing 152 has a mirror surface 154 and pivots relative to an inner housing 158. A second mirror surface 156 is provided behind the outer housing 152, such that when the outer housing 152 is in its extended position the second mirror surface 156 is visible. The vehicle body 160 mounts the inner housing 158 in any known fashion.

Figure 13 is a rear view of the mirror embodiment 150, showing the outer housing 152 in its extended position. The inner housing 158 carries a reflector 152. A second reflector 164 may be mounted on the outer housing 152.

Figure 14 is a cross-sectional view through the embodiment 150. As shown, the outer housing 152 has pivoted relative to the inner housing 158. The outer housing 152 may carry a generally cylindrical boss 165 which is mounted in a cylindrical member 167, fixed to the housing 158. The boss 165 rotates in the member 167, and defines an axis of rotation for the outer housing 152. O-rings 157 may seal between member 167 and boss 165. As in the earlier embodiments, this axis of rotation is off center relative to the center of the mirror 154, and thus by pivoting the outer housing 152 one achieves the extended position as shown in

Figures 12 and 13.

A motor power pack 166 is provided which may adjust the mirror surface 154 as is known. Power packs having the ability to adjust the mirrors are incorporated in many vehicles, and may be of conventional structure and function.

The boss 165 may be provided with gear teeth 169 at a portion of its outer periphery. A gear 168 may be driven by a motor 170 such that the housing 152 may be power driven between its inboard and outboard positions. Alternatively, this embodiment may also be manually moved between the inboard and outboard
5 positions. A retainer clip and spring combination 154 are secured on an end 174 of the boss 165, and biases the boss 165 against an inner ledge 175 of the cylindrical member 167. This thus secures the outer housing 152 within the inner housing 158.

A preferred description of this invention has been disclosed; however, a
10 worker of ordinary skill in the art would recognize that certain modifications would come within the scope of this invention. For that reason, the following claims should be studied in order to determine the true scope and content of this invention.